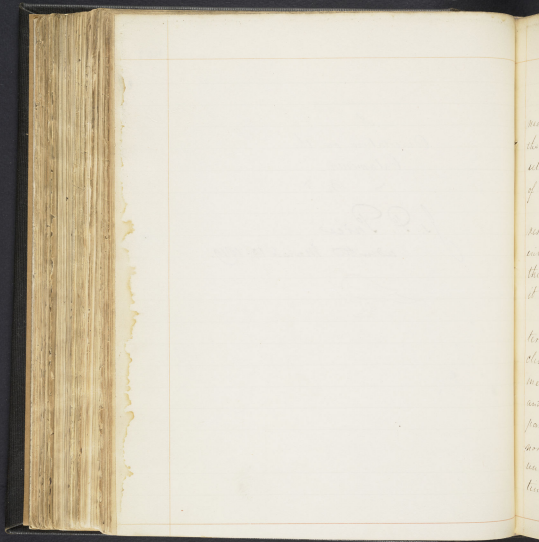


James  
Dissertations on the  
Catamenia.

By

J. P. Price

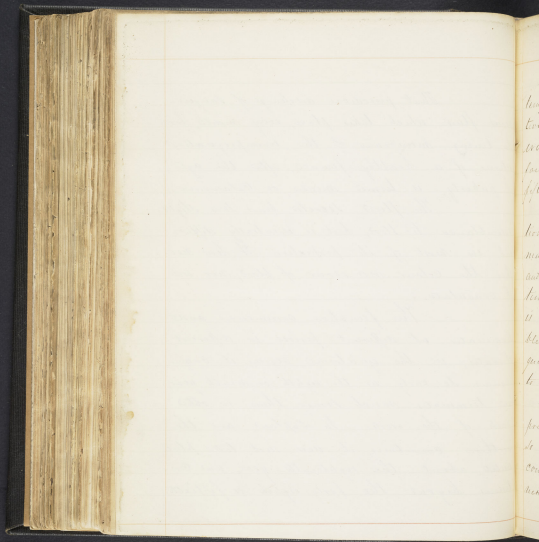
admitted March 19. 1819.



That periodic discharge of sanguinous fluid which takes place, every month, from the living membrane of the unimpregnated uterus of a healthy female, after the age of puberty, is termed menses or Catamenia.

The fluid secreted bears some slight resemblance to blood, but is essentially different in most of its properties. It has neither the colour nor odour of blood, nor will it coagulate.

This function commences and terminates at different periods in different climates; in the equatorial regions it commences so early as the eighth or ninth year, and terminates much sooner than in other parts of the world. In Lapland, and the northern countries, it does not take place until about the eighteenth year, and continues beyond the forty-eighth or fiftieth.

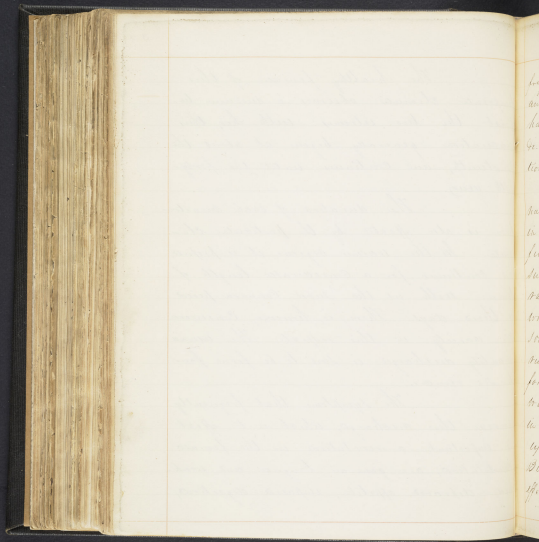




The healthy female of this temperate climate observes a medium between the two extremes: with her, this evacuation generally begins at about the fourteenth, and continues until the forty-fifth year.

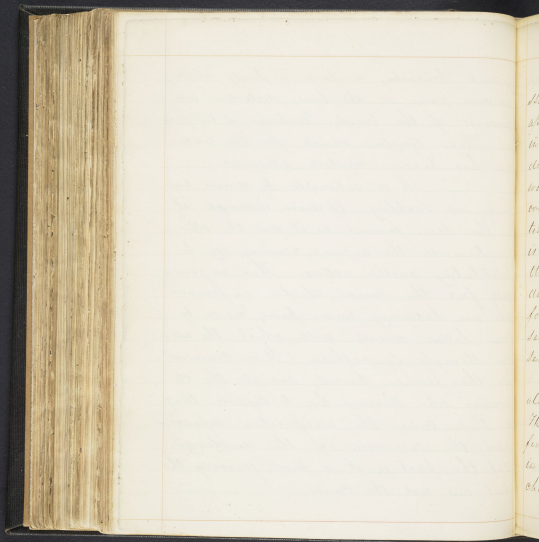
The duration of each menstruation is also affected by the particular climate. In the warmer regions it is protracted and continues for a considerable length of time: with us the most common period is three days. There is, however, considerable variety in this respect. The usual quantity discharged is said to be from four to six ounces.

The symptoms that frequently precede this discharge, which is to effect so important a revolution in the female constitution, are general languor and weakness, depraved appetite, impaired digestion,



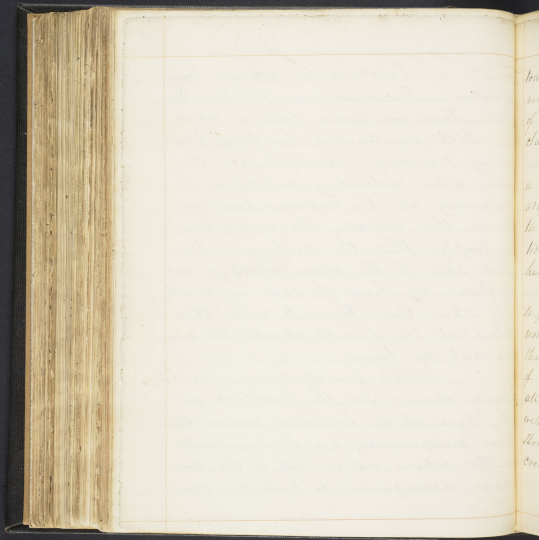
frequent headaches, a sense of heat, weight, and dull pains in the loins, distention and hardness of the breasts, flushings of the face, &c. These symptoms vanish after the evacuation has become regularly established.

It is interrupted by disease, pregnancy, and suckling. Disease interrupts it in the same manner as it does the other functions in the animal economy, viz. by substituting another action. Thus, we generally find the menses checked in females who are labouring under fever, &c.; or, by some local disease with which the uterus strongly sympathizes. It is common for the female herself, and all the old women who surround her, to suppose that in these cases, the indisposition depends upon the suppression of this discharge. But the fact is, it is most generally the effect and not the cause.



Pregnancy also interrupts menstruations. The reason will be shown hereafter. There are several cases on record in which menstruation has taken place during pregnancy. At first view this would appear astonishing, and capable of overturning all the doctrines promulgated on this subject. The explanation is simply, that the discharge is from that part of the uterus which is not developed, viz. from the neck and mouth, for, when these begin to unfold themselves at the seventh month the menses cease no longer.

They generally cease, as we have already observed, after the forti-fifth year. The signs which frequently precede their final disappearance, are an irregularity in the return and quantity of the discharge, accompanied by hysterical symp-

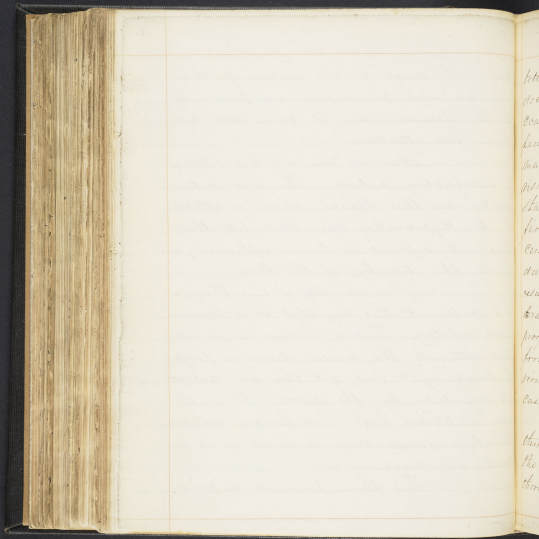


tion. So much for the nature of this very wonderful phenomenon and peculiarity of the female sex. It calls into view claims our attention.

Here we can say but little of a satisfactory nature. The first notion adopted on this subject, which is attributed to Hippocrates, was, that like the tides, it depends on lunar influence; and hence the etymology of the term.

The absurdity of this theory is so palpable at this day that it is scarcely worth refuting. It may, however, be remarked, that although the menses observe a period of twenty-eight days, yet they are not at all regulated by the moon. It is a well established fact that females are menstruating during every moment of its increase and wane.

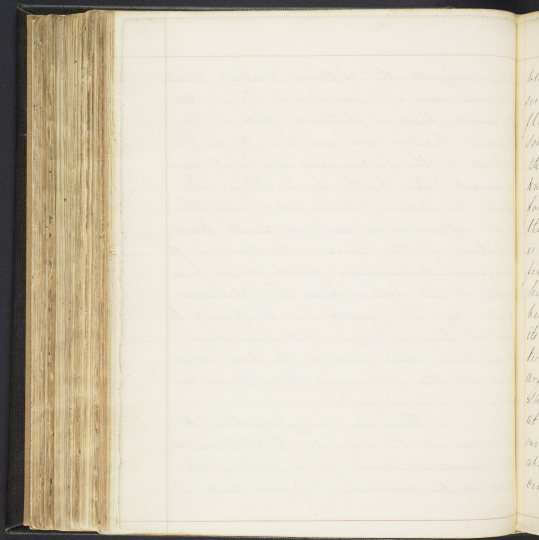
This theory prevails until this





tells suggests the plethoric doctrine, which  
 doctrine was also embraced by Galen. He  
 conceived that a plethoric state of the  
 femoral system was essential to the for-  
 mation of the foetus, and also for its main-  
 tenance, after birth, by suckling. This  
 state, he supposed, commenced with the  
 first appearance, and ended with the final  
 cessation of the menses. He considered the  
 dangerous consequences which would ensue  
 result to the system from this plethoric  
 state by the menstrual discharge. In  
 proof of this he urged that hemorrhage  
 from some other part of the body, view-  
 ed as the Catamenia, takes place in  
 cases of suppression.

There are many objections to  
 this view of the subject. If plethoria be  
 the immediate cause, it is such a ple-  
 thoria as the evacuation of four ounces of

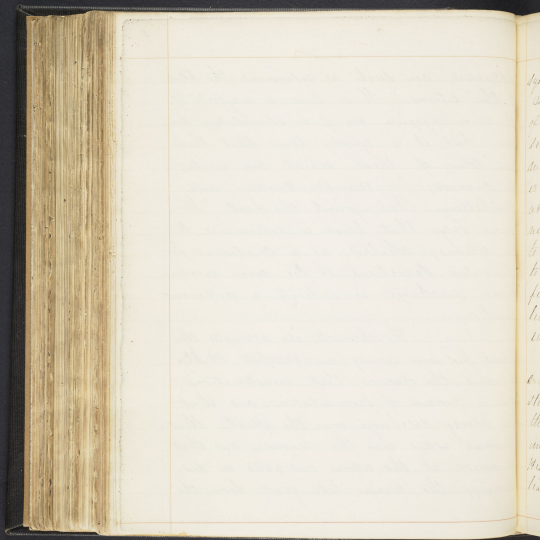


blood cannot be spared; certainly, if the men-  
 ses depend upon a plethora of such a tri-  
 fling nature, the attraction of blood from  
 some other part of the body would prevent  
 the flow from the uterus. But this we  
 know is not the fact. Twenty, thirty, even  
 forty ounces have been abstracted, yet  
 the menses take place as usual; and what  
 is more to the point, bleeding has of-  
 ten a return of the menses when they  
 have been suppressed. Habit, it has  
 been asserted, is a sufficient reason for  
 its taking place even though such deple-  
 tion should have been resorted to. This  
 argument has so little weight that we  
 shall not put ourselves out of the way  
 at present to answer it. Another argu-  
 ment which is offered in favour of the  
 above doctrine is, that all those medi-  
 cines which bring on the menses, when

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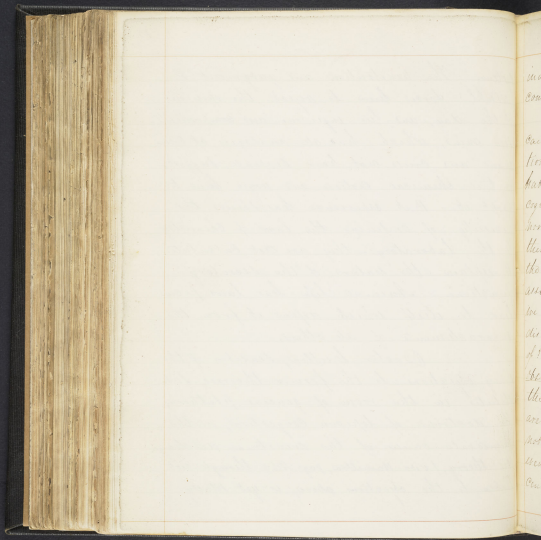
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suppressed, are such as determine the blood  
to the uterus. It is true a majority of  
the emmenagogues are of a stimulating na-  
ture; but it is equally true that there  
are some of them which are quite  
the reverse; for example, bleeding and  
bloodletting. But grant the fact. It  
proves only that blood is determined to  
the uterus; whether as a material for  
glandular secretions, or for some saccha-  
rine discharge is entirely a different  
question.

The chemists also attempted the  
subject, but were equally unsuccessful. Stahl  
broached the opinion that menstruation  
was a process of fermentation, and that  
the bloody discharge was the effect - that  
venereal matter was the cause - and that  
it arrived at the uterus and acted in dis-  
charging the menses, like yeast from the



system. The penetration and judgment of Stahl's forces him to reject the opinions of the day, and his ingenious and comprehensive mind, which has an analogue at command and could not bear suspense, suggests the chemical action and urges him to adopt it. But experience has shown the necessity of confining the laws of Chemistry to the laboratory:—they are not calculated to explain the nature of the secretory functions. Animal life has laws peculiar to itself which defend it from the encroachments of all others.

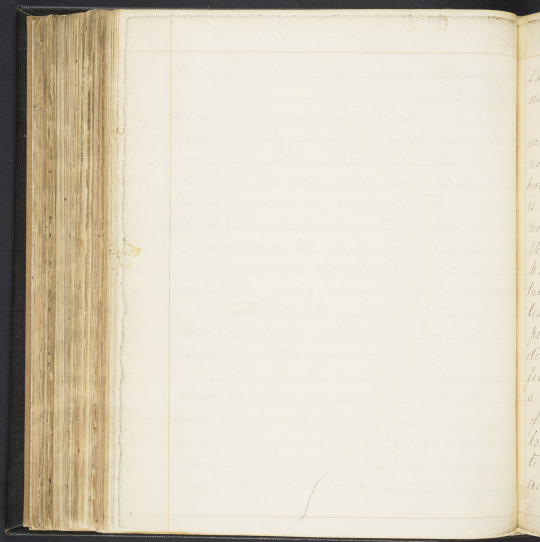
Doctor Lullien, sensible of the many objections to the former theories, substitutes in the room of general plethora, the doctrine of topical congestion, as the immediate cause of the menstrual discharge. His theory, (vide Hamilton, page 44,) though not liable to the objections above, is yet totally





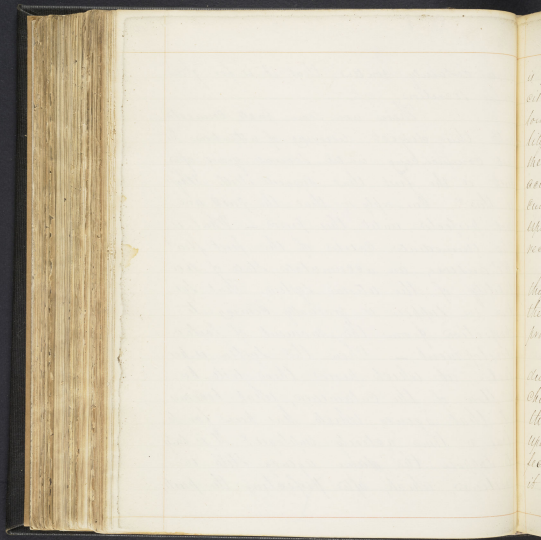
inadequate to explain the occurrence of the complaint.

Habit has been assumed as the cause; and what is habit but a repetition of the same act - then it is not habit until some time after the act is repeated. The first act is certainly not habit, nor the second, third, fourth, nor fifth, &c. Habit then cannot account for the occurrence of the menues. The topicus conjecture is an assumption, and does not accord with what we know of the uterus. Who can saw the distention of vessels that Gallen speaks of? Morgagni, deservingly thinks the acute however, never observed the congestion; on the contrary, he tells us that the vessels are convulsed and puckered, a state of affairs not well suited for topicus congestion. If we were to admit that there is a greater largeness at the period of menstruation, too



Shall certainly contend that it is for glandular secretions.

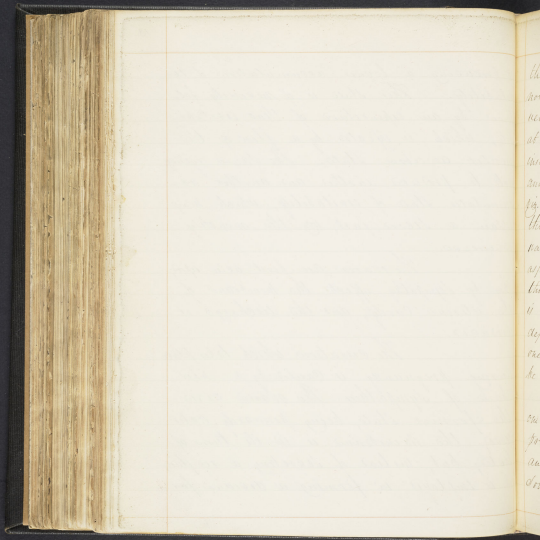
There are some facts connected with this subject deserving of attention. Its not commencing until several years after birth is the first that suggests itself. Why is this? Our reply is, that the parts are not perfected until this period. — What is the immediate cause of the first flow? We answer, an accumulated state of irritability of the uterine system. That system we suppose is gradually coming to perfection from the moment of foetal development. — When the system is perfected, at which period there will be a flow of the Catamenia, what becomes of that agency which has been for so long a time actively employed? It is vain to suppose the same agency still in existence, which, after perfecting the parts,



is producing a local accumulation of irritability. This state is of necessity followed by an expenditure of that irritability, which is effected by a flow of the menses at above state. The same agency acts to produce another and another, accumulating state of irritability, which may explain a second fact, viz. the monthly recurrence.

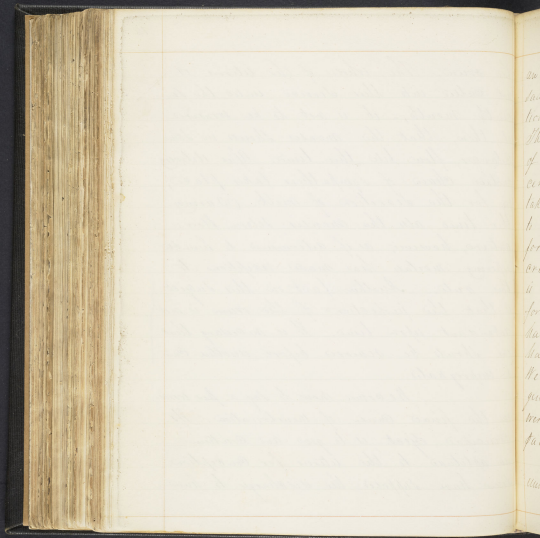
The ovaries are first acted upon, they by sympathy affect the membrane of the uterine cavity, and the discharge is produced.

The eversion which takes place during pregnancy is caused by a new chain of sympathies. The ovaries as in the former state, being primarily acted upon, the membrane is in its turn affected, but, instead of secreting a red fluid, it is employed in forming a decidua for



the ovum. The whole of the uterus is not called into this service until the seventh month; - it is not to be wondered at then, that the menses should in some instances flow till this time. After delivery another chain of sympathies takes place; viz. for the secretion of milk. During this time also the menses seldom flow: nature, however, as if determined to humiliate aspiring mortals has made exceptions to this rule. Another fact on this subject is that the perfection of the ovum is not dependant upon time. It is necessary that one should be removed before another can be impregnated.

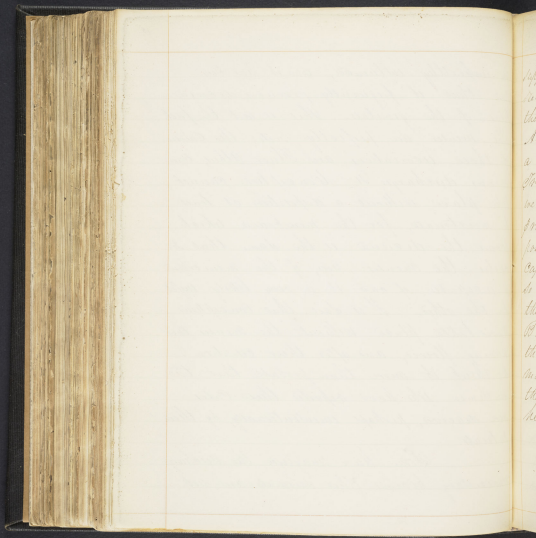
We come now to say a few words on the final cause of menstruation. Its principal object is to give our creations an aptitude to the uterus for conception. Some have supposed the discharge to have





an unhealthy influence; and it has been said that it frequently produces variations of the genital. This is not the fact. The menses are perfectly safe: the causes of these variations are Fluor Alba, Cancerous discharges, &c. Conception cannot take place without a disposition at least to menstruate, for the membrane which forms the decidua is the same that separates the menses: now, if the membrane is incapable of one it is very likely unfit for the other. It is said that conceptions have taken place without the menses ever having flowed, and after their cessation. We think it more than probable that the gentlemen who have reported these cases were deceived, perhaps unintentionally, by their patients.

Some have imagined the discharge unnecessary because other animals are not



supposed to have it. There is no ground for such kind of analogies; and, admitting them, the fact is contrary to what is asserted. Almost all of the domestic animals have a peculiar discharge somewhat analogous. True it is not sanguine; and why, because we imagine that not necessary. It has as property far better calculated for the purpose of publishing to its own kind the capability of Conception, viz. a strong odor, so strong indeed that we frequently find the males attracted for a mile around. But the human species, remarkable for their acute observation, have chosen to make the discharge perceptible, so that the female may be fully convinced that her state is perfect.

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